

JUNE 10, 2003

PUTTING AN END TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. J. Res. 8, a resolution to raise awareness and encourage prevention of sexual assault. There is no crime that is more personal, more intrusive, or more painful than rape, and it must be a priority of this Congress and this Administration to work toward an end to this violence. Unfortunately, while this resolution is a nice demonstration of sympathy and support from the Congress, it is woefully inadequate. While I strongly support its passage, the Republican Leadership should allow the House to consider legislation to provide real relief to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. It is my hope that this resolution will be followed by consideration of H.R. 1267, the Domestic Violence Screening, Treatment, and Protection Act; H.R. 1046, the Debbie Smith Act dealing with the DNA evidence backlog; H.R. 394, the Violence Against Women Civil Rights Restoration Act; and many others.

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We have come a long way in the last 30 years since women started speaking up and speaking out against sexual assault. We are now better able to treat rape victims in emergency rooms; law enforcement has access to tools to teach them how to respond to the crime of sexual assault; and there are social and mental health services available to women who are survivors of rape. I am grateful for this progress.

However, as we've raised awareness of this violence, we have also learned that it reaches far deeper into every aspect of our society than we wanted to admit or acknowledge. It is far more likely that perpetrators know their victims and aren't just strangers in the bushes. And women aren't the only victims - one in 33 men have been victims of rape or attempted rape. Furthermore, teens are twice as likely as any other age group to be victims of crime - nearly one-third of all sexual assault victims are raped between the ages of 12 and 17, and one in five girls become a victim of violence in dating relationships. □ □

We've also heard a lot this year about women at the Air Force Academy who have been victims of sexual assault. It is a disgrace that so many women have been re-victimized and silenced as a result of our military's reaction to these violent crimes. We must work hard to change the culture in every branch and at every level of the military from one that accepts violence against women to one that condemns such violence and treats victims, and all women, with respect and equality. But what we haven't heard much about is that men in the military are also victims of sexual assault. A special report appeared in January 2003 and revealed that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs began collecting nationwide data on the extent to which men have been sexually traumatized in the armed services. The preliminary results are that nearly 22,500 male veterans - more than one of every 100 former soldiers, sailors and airmen treated by the VA - reported being sexually traumatized by peers or superiors during their military careers. This once

again shows that sexual violence is about humiliation, degradation, and control.

We must commit ourselves to ending violence against women this month and every month. We must fully fund all Violence Against Women Act programs. We must speak up when we hear people speak about sexual violence in a dismissive or harmful way. We must educate our sons to be nonviolent and to treat women with respect. I believe that if we commit ourselves, we can end violence against women. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to vote for S. J. Res. 8!